

South Korea

I originally did not think of South Korea as a great trout destination. The country did have many streams in the mountains of the northeast and several native trout. There was one fish that caught my attention. Manchurian Trout are Lenok on the Korean Peninsula. I was led to believe that Lenok in South Korea were endangered and hard to find. But South Korea has the distinction of being the southern range of Lenok in Asia and I decided to search Korea for Manchurian Trout. There would also be Cherry Trout in South Korea so that was enough reason to pack the rods. It turned out that there were three different forms of this small Pacific



I had some of the best Cherry Salmon fishing of the Far East in South Korean. These small salmon are extremely quick and difficult to hook.

Salmon in the country. I didn't realize this before the trips to the peninsula so it was another learning experience. I had been in South Korea several times but had never fished. So when my Korean friend Jungkook Lee suggested what we spend time in the mountains I was ready to go. Jungkook owns a fly shop in Seoul and is an avid fly fisherman. I had learned that the best trout fishing in the country was in the mountains of Gangwon-do Province.

There are many rivers and streams in this area but it does take local knowledge to find

the different trout. This northeast province bordered the DMZ and as fate would have it we did fish just north of the International Peace City. There are several large National Parks in Gangwon-do Province and more to the south. When I first saw the map I thought that these would be good places to fish. I asked about the parks and was surprised when I was told that there is no fishing allowed in the National Parks.

Fishing permits are not required in South Korea and anywhere we wanted to fish we parked and fished. That sounds easy but in most cases the challenge was getting to the water. The rivers seemed to all be in canyons and few were easy to walk into. There are many mountains in South Korea and the best trout fishing is in the northeast and requires driving 2-3 hours from Seoul to get to the streams. There are closer mountains but the water tends to warmer in the mountains of the south. South Korean has a good road system and all of the streams are more or less by a road. The traffic is not bad once out of Seoul but getting out of Seoul can be a challenge. There are eleven million people in Seoul and it seems that everyone has a car. This is about twenty percent of the population in one concentrated area. There are lots of cars and many people. Driving in South Korea is on the right side of the road and the steering wheel is

on the left side of the vehicle. The roads in South Korea were good and it would have been possible to rent a car and get around. But finding the rivers would be very difficult and looking for specific types of trout impossible.

My friend Jungkook said that there are a good number of people that fly fish in South Korea and a good business for the fly shop. He usually takes people out for day trips from Seoul and this was the first time he had never done a multiday trip. I tried to reassure him that it would be a fun trip and we would have a good time searching the Country for trout. The first stream was not what I had expected. I had expected to see rivers at the bottom of steep canyons with a lot of fast water. The first stream we fished was in the foothills and did have some fall but not a strong current. It was a nice stream in rural South Korea. It was a great place to start and the exception when it came to stream access. It was an easy walk and right off the bat I started catching Rainbow. I had heard that there were many Rainbow Trout in South Korea and all were escapees from small trout farms. Jungkook said that what I had heard was true. There are many small trout hatcheries in South Korea and all of them are next to a river. Flooding is common in the Country and it is not unusual for all of the hatchery fish to be washed into the adjoining river. These floods continue to replenish the Rainbow. There are some rivers that do receive stocked Rainbow from National Hatcheries. But it is the small fish farms that are responsible for most of the Rainbow Trout in the streams and rivers throughout the Country. That first river started producing Manchurian Trout and I was again surprised to see a trout like none I had ever seen. It was a nice beginning to my South Korean Adventure.

I felt like I fished most of the trout water in the Country. Not every stream, but a sample of each area and type of river. My friend showed me the Country and its trout. I caught many trout in South Korea and Jungkook said that we did very well. He was right. There were several days that we were in double digits with the number of trout and there were a couple of Manchurian Trout that were over two pounds. The trout were not huge but there are few places in the world where all of the fishing is with dry flies. That was South Korea.